Introduction

I am conscious of short time I have had in responding to the theme in general and especially on Asian perspective since I am stepping in as a substitute. I am going to approach this theme in two ways. To begin with I will comment on Suh Jung Woon’s paper which was to be presented originally at this assembly and which deals with 5 issues on the theme which I can go along with on the whole, and then, I want to explore from an Asian woman’s perspective.

Firstly, Suh’s paper refers to Asia as a continent of diversity and complex. It is difficult to describe and to see mission work as a whole in Asia since there are varieties and many dimensions in mission in real situations. To understand mission in its context is a difficulty because Asia is not one context but many diverse contexts. Since the first century, Christian mission had been introduced with different mission approaches and strategies, and yet still Asia has the smallest percentage of Christians in comparison with the vast continent and the population.

Secondly, Suh is referring to many different theories and strategies which have been tried in Asian contexts and yet missioners are feeling lost in the way in terms of expansion of the kingdom of God. It is like in a deep fog, not able to see ahead. He writes that when one is lost in mountain climbing, rather than trying to find a way down which can be more dangerous than staying where one is, it is a must to climb up to the peak in order to see where you are. Likewise, he is suggesting to restore mission perspectives from its roots. The root of mission is in God, Jesus Incarnate and the Holy Spirit. He writes, ‘though we comment on the circumstances of politics, the economy, cultures and other religions, Jesus’ situation was very much the same.’

The early Church Christians as a small minority in the Roman world, severely discriminated politically, economically and socially marginalized and persecuted, yet they had joy to press on with mission in the light of

---

the Gospel. For them the gospel was the life and work of Jesus Christ. As they scattered due to persecution and poverty, they were used as God’s missionary people in drawing peoples to the triune God wherever they were and thus making a community of believers in Christ, establishing churches. In Roman world and Asia.

This is not an old, old story but also relevant in today’s Asia, he says. For example, Chinese church with its background of past cultural revolution and ideology for over a half century, not much known to the world of ordinary people for decades, yet, it is vitalized and grown with maturity through persecution, oppression and poverty. This is beyond of missiological approaches and strategies. This is a mystery. The missionary people in the light of the Gospel in that vast continent has been to endure, to have patience with positive expectation and with hope, to worship in silence often without any visible space to get together, to memorize Scriptures from mouth to mouth often without having the Scriptures or even some portion of the Scriptures. The nature of mission was to hold on to Jesus Christ, the word made flesh. Justification of mission was God, the Holy Spirit who sustained the Chinese church. As there is vigorous research and reports are going on China, we expect some light shining brightly for further clearing fog among missionary people in China and in Asia.

Thirdly, Suh refers to evangelism as core, heart and center in mission. He points out that neglect on evangelism weakens mission. Evangelism is testifying Jesus Christ just as he is testified in the Bible. The message is not to be attenuated with contemporary values and trends. There is fear in many cases and doubts in matter of evanglistic approaches due to different understandings, uncertainties and lack of conviction on the person of Jesus Christ. Central task in mission in the light of the Gospel is thus to reveal and to witness Jesus Christ who is still hidden in many eyes of Asian traditions, cultures, and ideologies. Sometimes He is hidden due to Christians’ lack of love for their neighbors, and their lack of understanding of their neighbors, and due to their worldly lives which are not different from others who have no light of the gospel. However, there is longing and crying to meet Jesus Christ in many hearts who seem to reject evangelism. They react against certain approaches but they seek truth and love. They thirst for genuineness and for authentic living. Jesus Christ is reconciling with all separations and satisfies all thrusts and yearnings.

Mission is witnessing of Jesus Christ to the world. It is beyond dialogue and competition with mission strategies. Justification of mission is in seeking to help people to encounter with Jesus who is the truth, the way and the life in this suffering world, death prevailing world, and fear prevailing world.

Fourthly, Suh goes on to ask what kind of Jesus we are witnessing. In mission history Jesus often has been portrayed as a victorious and powerful winner. But, Jesus was on the cross helpless and forlorn. Although he had powerful self claims, such as the light of the world and the bread of the world, which were in reality a life of giving, draining and becoming empty, nothing and death. He lived a life of meakness, suffering, lonesomeness and poverty. Passion of Christ, much debatable film shows extreme physical violence done to him. Who can be compared with his suffering and helplessness?

Fifthly, emphasis is on the changed and resurrected life in spite of all circumstances. There is much concern for poverty, discrimination, evil structures, inequality, conflicts and wars. Rightly so. There should be tireless and vigorous efforts and actions to eliminate these, nevertheless it is a fact that there is always the poor and always wars. In the midst of these, there should be and is possible dimension of loving and forgiving in spite of all the sufferings and deathlike contexts when one can see Jesus. Issues and problems are always in different shapes and kinds, issues and problems may not be solved and satisfactorily dealt with, yet there is life worth living which goes beyond issues and problems. Contexts are always there with endless conflicts and mission of God continues in and through, and beyond contexts.

With above remarks on Suh Jung Woon’s paper, now I want to comment further on one different approach in understanding on integrity of mission in the light of the gospel. That is women’s approaches in mission as from the poor to the poor. I name this mission from the poor to the poor.
Asian Christian women’s approaches are much hidden and veiled. There is much room for realizing mutual participation with official and recorded work of mission through mainline churches and mission societies in the process of work of the kingdom of God. I would name it as a missiology of emptiness and a missiology of comforting.

Missiology of Emptiness – mission from the poor to the poor: theolozing in mission from an Asian woman’s perspective.

Asia has Christian population with a higher percentage of women and youth. Even if one does not research on statistics, it is daily observation in Christian gatherings in different Korean churches in cities and villages. One sees that in Sunday worship services, there are mostly women and youth.

Women from Jesus time were used in witnessing to life and work of Jesus Christ. One does not need to go into Biblical passages which testify women’s roles in the formation of the early Christian community and how Jesus in his earthly ministry women were there together at important and critical times. Then, in the early history of the church, “Consecrated virgins, widows, and female martyrs were some of the most important witnesses to the gospel during the first few centuries of the church. Even in periods of history in which women have been discouraged from engaging in mission and ministry, the memory of early women’s mission work lingered in Christian legend.”

Although there are the precedents in the Bible, church and mission history, and yet Christian women’s roles in church and missionary approaches in Asian contexts have not been recorded nor recognized sufficiently. Church historians depend on mainline church documents and are unable to find hidden faces of women who have precious mission stories, especially women in mission who have been on leadership in pioneering mission work.

There are now writings coming out by women missiologists, however mainline churches and mission societies seem to take those works as a marginal piece. It is a reality in Asian churches, women are more than men in number, and it is a common knowledge that women are vehicles of evangelism for their families and neighbors more than men. In Korean church, some 75% are women. Women evangelists, women deacons, mothers and daughters are the ones who most of the time give their total service for the faith community and its neighbors in visiting, in prayers, in counseling and in variety of aids. Organization of women’s mission in each local church is nationwide and its united efforts in national network reach to most strata of Korean society with deeds of love and readings of the Bible. Women’s witness with the gospel to the world is carried out in weakness and selflessness.

I know of one woman professor who had started with a small gathering with reading of the Scriptures and now it has grown to 7 hundreds with young women in study of the Scriptures meeting in a high school auditorium in a few years. Even so there are churches and denominations which do not recognize nor welcome women as mimisters. It does not matter whether mainline churches do not see the precious ministry of women and whether mission historians discover the treasures of women’s contribution in history of mission or not. It is their limitation and their problem. The reality is important.

The reality is that women in mission without names and in most cases without writings have been vehicles of the gospel in the Korean churches and in Asia. Their roles have been just giving, life-giving without any demand for receiving and for recognition. They are always behind and hidden in life-giving work. It is because of their experience of life being given as a gift from God and their love for life itself make it possible to give without ceasing as seen in a life of a mother for her children. Mother does all she can in order to let her child grow in health and in beauty, but when the child is grown, she is still giving until she is no more.

Women’s leadership in mission societies and in mission fields is not encouraged. It is more so in

---

evangelical churches and mission societies. There is further pressure on unmarried single women missionaries in comparison to married women in mission fields as well as at home base. Some societies do not accept single women candidates with a condition that only married couples may apply for cross-cultural work. It is interesting to note that there is such a prejudiced understanding for women, especially regarding unmarried women missionaries in this century when there are records of unmarried women missionaries who came to Asia from the Western churches and pioneered in establishing churches, schools, hospitals and diverse social care services with able leadership.

Although there are dynamic projects on women issues by some women’s institutes, those do not relate with women missionaries. There is a dichotomy between women of the Korean church with emphasis on evangelism and theologians with activists of feminism. It is a point of concern to see those two efforts may have mutual acceptance for each particular contribution. It is mission to experience unity, fellowship and reconciliation. There is more need for relational ministry rather than outwardly visible projects. Dana Roberts writes: “On going struggles against structural evils must be linked with evangelization so that good news of Jesus Christ is truly good news for women both in the world and in the church. The hostility between evangelism and feminism must end for the sake of realizing the full cooperating potential of the gospel. The existence of a female majority in the world church must no longer be ignored. Rather, it should be celebrated and become a source of inspiration for a more authentic form of mission. As we move into the 21st century, we should affirm the kind of holistic women’s vision for mission that anticipates the reign of God. In which all are “one in Christ Jesus”(Gal 3:28).”

It has been said that 21st century is a century of women. Next year there will be an international women’s conference at Ewha Womans University. Then, it is yet to see whether the Korean church and churches in Asia may be challenged to realize as a century of women, especially women in mission. Dana Roberts writes, “I would emphasize that statistically speaking, world Christianity is a women’s movement” Asia with its women population challenges mission of the 21st century to see women as not a marginality but centrality in mission with their devotion, selfless giving for their families, for healing of wounded in life due to lack of love and support through their caring lifestyle.

It is hoped that feminist theologians, who seek action in love, solidarity and justice in distortion and deformation of the people of God and people of the world, may seek solidarity, communion and cooperation with women missiologists and ministers of evangelization motive who takes evangelism and church planting seriously along with healing, reconciliation and solidarity.

Isn’t it ironic to observe that there is no fellowship and mutual welcome among feminist theologians and evangelical missiologists whereas they relate well with women of other religions and confessions in their own ways. Is it due to competition or control with each other. One in Christ is a call for women leadership.

Katija Heidemanns speaks of missiology of risk in comparison of a missiology of control. It seems that there is hope for mutuality of women of two major backgrounds in missiology since missiology of risk is in aspiration of response to the Spirit’s call to live with love, with empathy and responsibility. Missiology of risk accepts finitude, interdependence, and change. And it should have room to be for communion with missiology of proclamation, pursuasion and presence., especially so for Asian women in the church and in the world who do not have opportunity to listen to the gospel in a way they can understand in their contexts, cultures and languages. Majority of women in Asia live daily with children, home-making, and relatives without any concern for any other matters. They just want to live in peace, in peace, in health and with supplies.

Missiology of comforting
Missiology of comforting draws from the Spirit as the source of both healing and transforming

---

3 Dana Roberts, Ibid. p. 61.
4 Dana Roberts, Ibid., p 61.
energy. Presence of God in the person of the Holy Spirit helps to overcome duality and separation, heals our broken bonds and sustains diversity in koinonia.5 “Thus, what is urgently needed these days is an understating of mission practice which is inspired by this movement of the Spirit, i.e. an understanding of mission as a process of exploration...”6 Of course mission is not a finished project once for all. Mission continues until the whole people have opportunity to open their inner eyes to the glory of God in creation, in history and in today’s world. The Holy Spirit is the one who comforts groaning peoples who do not know how to move ahead. God is God of comforting. He comforts in affliction, sufferings, and brokenness. Without experiencing His comforting, one does not know how to comfort those in need. Women as mothers are always comforting their children who are in return source of comfort for their mothers.. Mothers are weak and much suffering but they nevertheless they are strong in comforting their children in need because they are willingly give themselves for them..

One can picture of a mother who comforts her child. It is a beautiful picture. It is vulnerable because she and her child are not protected from dangers and uncertainties. There is a beauty when one cares for life and for living things. I would like to look at God of beauty in that vulnerable picture as a psalmist sang, “…to behold the beauty of the Lord” When something is beautiful, it helps to enter into a world of above being liberated even a moment from closed and destructive circumstances. It is like an art work which takes us into a world of the artist. I would like mission being seen as an art rather than politics, economy, expansion, power, ruling and managing. If God’s missionary people can be seen as beautiful like a mother feeding a helpless and totally dependent child even in a time of battle, it gives hope to those who have only despair, anger, revenge, and tears. What I am trying to say here is that much of the Protestant mission in Asia have been evaluated in terms of numbers, buildings, institutions, expansions, powers and wealth. I am not saying those are not needed nor important, but however, I am saying mission is to give faith, love and hope to the people of the church and to the people of the world. Asian women of their first generation of their Christian faith did not come to the point of being used of God because they have received all the answers of their problems and handicaps, but they could sustain themselves because there were signs of faith, love and hope from time to time through means of somebody and some events.

So, to make it short, what matters is the person who carries the gospel if she reflects the beauty of the Lord which will enable her neighbors to see that God is with her, blessing her in spite of limited and conflicted contexts. Missionary people must be people of singing poems like psalmists of the ancient times which open up heavenly road from deadly closed road.

Further, I would like to comment on beholding beauty of God, the creator in relation with nature. Development and progress make nature aching in destruction and extensive use. People of cities with convenience of comfortable living want now to go to earth to feel it and breathe fresh air among trees and birds. Integrity of mission should include caring nature with recognition of the awesome handiwork of God. Jesus himself drew his teaching from many images from nature. Mission is comforting. Nature unspoiled has strong comforting effects and healing power. When I think of mission of God as an art, people and nature are to point to God, their creator reflecting the glory of God. Many forms of flowers, big, small and many kinds of yellow, dark purple, orange, pink and white, etc all contribute to imagine of mystery of the creator. Sometimes, beauty of flowers in unexpected hillside gives passerby surprise with joy and wonder, leading the person beyond. If a flower can lead into praising for living and the origin of life, God, how much more should man and woman created in the image of God!

In today’s world most conflicts, violence, wars are started by male dominant power system. These

5 Katja Heidermanns, “Missiology of Risk”: Explorations in mission Theology from a German Feminist Perspective”, International Review of Mision, vol95 no. 568, Jan, Here she writes on missiology of the Holy Spirit who does help out in all process of explorations. However, I would go further there need to be clear message of comforting based on the Scritprues and history. b 2004, p109.

Destructive problems destroy families, ethnic peoples and nations such as the conflicts and wars in Middle East as well as other parts of Asia. Women as mothers are caring for life and feeding helpless and hungry. They simply want their families kept alive, well fed, and be together. At wars many men die and women live with children for whom women have to find ways to survive. In lesser scale, on family conflicts and separation, often men are the source of imposing suffering and conflicts on family members, especially on women. There are women who lost their sons in wars and in violence due to ideological and political turmoil. Then, women have to remain in sorrow and just live helplessly loosing their husbands and sons. They are women of wounds and deep hurts. Women do not start violence nor war and they are victims of violence and wars. They continue to live with their children caring and feeding. Women do not take revenge in action as there is no power to take revenge and they want to live in reconciliation and peace. In today’s world to solve violence and war, again violence and war are used. There is no end to it. There is no true answer to use power for overcoming oppressive power. Non violence is the answer as seen in history. “The power that broke the hold of sin on the world was the powerlessness, the agony, and the humiliation of the cross. The blood that was shed in violence becomes life-giving, redeeming blood.” Women have courage to be weak as Jesus emptied himself and comforted to the point of death. I think that genuine mission is present when there is life-giving in humility and in weakness because of love for lives unconditionally.

There has been missionary work too much and too busy by giving material things, by developing institutions and by expansion. The 21st century mission is calling for those who are weak and are joyfully giving themselves. Even if women as a missionary people in Asia have so little in terms of sharing in visibility and moreover many of them have deep wounds in their inner life by various violence done not only to them directly but to their families, but God can use them as wounded healer in restoring life in death-like situations and in comforting among suffering peoples.

The challenge is to understand mission in a new way that leads to emptiness to the point of nothingness and comforting by enabling people to recognize living itself is precious and thus responsibility for our common care is imperative. There is longing for comfort from God. Mission is weak and fragile, It is not to be recognized and be popular. It is to be nothing. Women’s comforting and life caring activity is what is needed rather than glamorously visible big and expensive projects.

However, there are a majority of Christian missions which drive for projects, buildings, and counting numbers through various strategies. In a missiology of emptiness and comforting, strategies are women themselves who give themselves like salt being dissolved to preserve life and give life, not concerned whether they are recognized or not because what they are interested is life and life-giving.

By way of closing, having made some remarks on Suh Jung woon’s paper, I have attempted to draw on women’s issues in mission. Often feminists try to emphasize equal participation with men in every strata of walk. I want to go beyond that. For me issue is not competition nor comparison. It is beyond these. Women in Asia and particularly in Korea are from the beginning of the churches to this present age women have been present at the center in mission. It does not matter whether the mainline churches and missiologists put women in mission at the center or not. It is a reality.

There is common understanding mission as something growing, expanding, numbering, building and likewise. However, mission from an Asian woman’s perspective it is becoming empty by giving for life and caring for living to the point of nothingness. Meanwhile mission should be understood as comforting, healing, reconciling in and through vulnerable conditions. Rather than mission in military sense, in successful managements, and through resourceful influence, mission is to overcome limited and hopeless human contexts through means of beholding beauty in ordinary life-giving lives which reflect beauty of the Lord of universe. Can those who are involved in mission be beautiful to behold to the eyes of those who are to share in the blessings and also be to reflect beauty of the Lord, the Savior, Jesus Christ?

---